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**Citation:** Iosifidis, P. (2017). Book review: Seamus Simpson, Manuel Puppis and Hilde Van den Bulck (eds) *European Media Policy for the Twenty-First Century: Assessing the Past, Setting Agendas for the Future*. *European Journal of Communication*, pp. 74-77. doi: 10.1177/0267323116687820

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**Link to published version:** <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323116687820>

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## **BOOK REVIEW**

**Seamus Simpson, Manuel Puppis and Hilde Van den Bulck (eds.),  
European Media Policy for the Twenty-First Century: Assessing the Past,  
Setting Agendas for the Future. Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2016.  
£90.00. 278 pp.**

*Published in the EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION, February  
2017, 32(1): pp. 74–77*

**Reviewer: Petros Iosifidis**

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Seamus Simpson, Manuel Puppis and Hilde Van den Bulck have put together a valuable collection of 12 articles. The contributors of this volume address a large number of European media policy issues arising from pertinent political, economic and technological advances in the wider communications domain. This is a daunting task given that the European media environment is complex as it is made up of divergent political systems and heterogeneous socio-cultural and economic structures with different levels of technological development. The growing complexities of media policy have been come to the fore recently due to technological, economic and political developments which have reshaped the media landscape. There is a growing body of literature in the European (and global) media policy and regulation, showing that there is increased interest in the field (see, for example, Collins, 1994; Freedman, 2008; Harcourt, 2005; Humphreys, 1996; Iosifidis, 2011; McQuail and Sinue, 1998; Napoli, 2001; Papathanassopoulos and Negrine, 2010). These works have some common themes: media convergence results in new configurations between traditional (i.e. the state) and new players (media industry, civil society); media

policymaking is no longer confined in national borders; supranational bodies such as the EU have been heavily involved in media policy.

This vital media policy project contributes to the body of knowledge by examining the technological and industrial/economic questions such as spectrum allocation and next generation networks, governance of media convergence and network neutrality. Not only that. The project also pays attention to socio-cultural questions such as the production of quality journalism, original and risky programming, and the role of public service media. Interestingly, the chapters are structured around four key policy themes, which emerged from deliberations that occurred at the 2013 ECREA conference (Communication Law and Policy section workshop): policy matters arising from ongoing media market convergence (Section I); the nature of public regulatory interference in media policy (Section II); policy issues relating to new electronic network ecologies (Section III); and understanding of policy matters from contexts beyond the EU (Section IV). This theme structure enhances the reader's knowledge and understanding of the various policy and regulatory issues particularly at a European level, but also internationally. Another helpful structural distinction in terms of policy debates is the book's identification of two main positions, namely optimists (arguing that regulation has become obsolete due to the explosion of services, devices and platforms) and pessimists (advocating the need for continuing regulatory intervention). But what really distinguishes this book from competition is the full consideration of the magnitude of policy action required to deal with media policy pressing issues as well as the consequences of policy action (or indeed inaction).

The 3 chapters in Section I deal with media policy and legal issues in an era of media convergence. Hilde Van den Bulck and Halvard Moe provide a critique of media policy researchers' preoccupation with contemporary developments of media technologies and services and call for a more historical contextualisation and the need to look beyond the current matters put on the agenda by powerful policy players. Using examples from the development of teletext services in Flanders and Norway the authors make a case for a historical media policy

analysis that typically improves the quality of contemporary debates and arguments. In her chapter Irini Katsirea investigates the regulatory regime of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) and questions its application to the electronic press in the age of media convergence. It uses the decisions of the UK and Austrian regulatory bodies for drawing regulatory boundary between newspaper websites that could possibly fall under the auspices of the AVMSD and those which do not qualify. Focusing on the legal and policy framework under which the Irish public service broadcaster operates, Jennifer Kavanagh looks into the regulations concerning broadcasting and legally required duties of balance in reporting election debates. The main point of her chapter is the use of social media, particularly tweets in encouraging audience contributions and its main finding is the need for verification of the sources of the information contained in the tweets.

Section II consists of 3 articles dealing with public regulatory intervention. Eva Lieven's piece discusses the implementation of self-regulation to protect children and minors and points to corporate social responsibility as a means to benefit the young in their engagement with social networks. In their contribution, Corinna Wenzel, Stefan Gadringer and Josef Trappel search for suitable types and forms of regulatory mechanisms in a number of countries (Germany, the UK, Austria, Switzerland and Canada) and question the effectiveness of state-initiated self-regulation in the media field, especially in times of crisis given the supremacy of vested industry interests. Mark Wheeler provides a review of media policy concerns relating to EC legislation and policy provisions to consider how several State Aid cases concerning digital switchover, public subsidies and enlargement were considered by the European Commission.

Section III features 3 articles addressing policy matters in advanced communications network environments. Maria Michalis examines the EU policy debates with regards to the superfast (and expensive) broadband networks and calls for a new regulatory paradigm that would prioritise competition, drive innovation, promote social and consumer welfare, and meanwhile support the Europe 2020 strategy. Equally significant to the debate on whether to provide

high speed Internet access services based on the ability to pay is the hot issue of network neutrality. Francesca Musiani and Maria Loblich adopt a public sphere theory framework to examine areas of net neutrality relevant to communication studies and underline the issue of intervention in order to guarantee access to communicative spaces and establish the conditions under which the spread of information occurs on the Internet. Olga Batura also discusses the issue of access to the network as a universal service concept and calls for a more user-friendly concept by European legislators that would take account of the expectations and communication needs of end-users.

Finally, the 3 articles of Section IV examine the lessons to be learned for EU media policy from cases beyond Europe. Beata Klimkiewicz discusses the under-addressed theme of EU media policy in the light of the enlargement process that creates regulatory challenges of integration, transposition of EU standards to the national level, and balance of values and media policy choices. Terry Flew identifies a wide range of challenges to media policy arising out of changes in the global, particularly Australian media ecology associated with convergence, including access to media content, the rise of user-generated content, innovation in media industries, and of course media globalisation. Maria Stella Righettini and Michele Tomellotto compare universal service policies in Europe and Latin America and analyse the extent to which respective telecommunications regulatory frameworks ensure universal service obligation programmes that include access to the Internet.

Overall, in this fascinating study of media policy in the twenty-first century the editors and authors demonstrate that the media policy field is continuously debated and contested in Europe and beyond and, in most cases, the stimulus is a pressing awareness of the implications of technological, political, economic and socio-cultural change in media markets. Essentially, the trends amount to the developing convergences between technologies, the creation and exploitation of new forms of content, including those of user generation and interactive services. These advances are occurring against a broader background of market oriented philosophies that promote deregulation and market liberalisation, all of

which create demanding tests for media policymakers and regulators. The editors have produced an impressive piece of work in structural and organisational terms whereas the authors have provided detailed and comprehensive descriptions and analyses of the various media policy trends.

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